

# MINUTES

**Quarterly Meeting of the  
MISSOURI VETERANS COMMISSION  
Held, pursuant to notice  
Tuesday, August 16, 2005 — 9:30 AM  
State Veterans Home – Warrensburg  
1300 Veterans Road  
Warrensburg, Missouri**

## **I. CALL TO ORDER**

- A. Invocation & Pledge of Allegiance
- B. Roll Call  
In attendance: **Chairman Emmett Fairfax; Vice Chairman Carson Ross; Member Bernadette Miller; Member General Arvid West**  
Excused Absence: **Joseph Frank, Member**
- C. Introductions  
Guests and staff present.
  - 1. Guest: **James Ernie Lee**, President MAVO; **Jack Matthews**, President MVC Foundation, Inc.; **Alice Fairfax; Eloise Ross; Jerry Miller; Jeremy Amick**, MONG State Benefits Advisor; **Representative David Pearce**, District 121; **Bill Brenner**, Presiding Commissioner, Johnson County; **Scott Sader**, Eastern District Commissioner, Johnson County; **Destry Hough**, Western District Commissioner, Johnson County; **Stephen Gaither**, Public Relations, VA Medical Center Columbia; **Stan Utley**, VA Medical Center Kansas City; **Roberta Kohler; Rose Bryant; James Gray**, Western District, Military Funeral Honors Program; **Sam Raber**, American Legion Post 90; **Tom King**, American Legion Post 131;
  - 2. Staff: **Ronald Taylor**, Executive Director; **Jill Talken**, Executive Secretary; **Hal Dulle**, Deputy Director; **Jess Rasmussen**, Director Higginsville Cemetery; **Anne Payne**, Superintendent of Homes; **Stan Baughn**, Director Service to Veterans Program; **Pat Rowe Kerr**, Veterans Ombudsman; **Bill Willet**, Administrator, Warrensburg Veterans Home; **Bryan Hunt**, Administrator, Cameron Veterans Home; **Bill Palmer**, STV Supervisor, Southeast Region; **John Burgess**, STV Supervisor, Northwest Region; **Jim Hurst**, STV Supervisor, Northeast Region; **Jerilyn Cornelius**, STV Program Secretary; **Julie Miller**, Chief Accountant; **Eric Endsley**, Assistant Administrator, Mexico Veterans Home; **Michelle Lee**, Unit Manager, Warrensburg Veterans Home; **Theresa Collins**, Volunteer Services, Warrensburg Veterans Home

- D. Approval of April 5, 2005 Commission Meeting Minutes. Commissioner Ross made a motion to accept the minutes and Commissioner Miller seconded the motion. The minutes of the previous meeting were approved as recorded.

## II. OLD BUSINESS:

### Management Report: Executive Director Comments: Ronald Taylor

**Commission Update** – Ron Taylor advised the Commissioner of current employee health issues. Gary Wofford, Computer Technologist has been approved for disability due to a health condition and has resigned from the Commission. Since the IT consolidation statewide we are required to go through OA for permission in filling positions. Once we have the okay from OA then we will proceed in filling the position. Due to the illness of Mike Robbins, Cemetery Director Springfield, Chuck Wooten has been appointed acting Director during his absence.

Mr. Taylor noted that the Commission is keeping busy with Supermarkets across the state.

**Budget Update** – Ron Taylor informed the Commissioners of current budget problems facing the Commission. He noted that we are currently preparing budget request. Primary importance is staffing issues with the Homes. A bill passed this past session that will go into effect January 1, 2006 which requires some state agencies to pay out overtime at the end of each month rather than how we currently have staff use comp time or we are able to delay paying overtime until we are assured we have enough money to do so. 1.2 million dollars was taken out of our P/S budget for paying regular employees and moved to a line item for paying overtime which leaves us with a little worry that we may not have enough money in our P/S budget to keep the staff on hand to keep the current level or to increase the level of occupancy. We have been speaking with OA regarding that impact and to see what avenues we may have to solve that issue.

The new budget request will be submitted to the department September 15<sup>th</sup> and MVC has been talking to key leaders as to what that support is going to be because additional staff will be needed to reach the full 95% to 97% occupancy in the Homes. As with most state agencies there are concerns with state salaries with no pay increases are not terribly competitive therefore we have to worry about turnover rates. Turnover rates create vacancies, which creates overtime which creates the budget issue. There will be a lot of challenges over the next two to three months. It will become clearer as to which avenue will be most advantages for MVC. A few things being looked at is that we do have flexibility with

E&E budget with permission from OA to shift over for P/S and the Homes Administrators and Anne Payne and Julie Miller are very busy right now figuring out the impact of all these things. Information has been shared with Commissioners and Governor's staff and Commissioner of OA and hopefully we have a response back from OA within the next 30 to 45 days.

Missouri Veterans Homes: Anne Payne, Superintendent of Homes

**Homes Program** – (Handouts) Anne Payne reported to the Commissioners that the Homes Program closed out their FY05 at the end of June and annually they have reviewed their Quality Management Outcomes for that current period. She noted that the Missouri Veterans Homes Program and the Missouri Veterans Commission really values maintaining high quality outcomes and this past year an additional 200 beds were opened giving MVC the capacity of 1,350 beds total. The average occupancy this past year was 1,159 which is at 85% occupancy. Ms. Payne noted that VA regulations require a certain amount of staff and at our current 85% occupancy we are bumping up into that requirement. Ms. Payne advised that a couple of things that are premier in the healthcare industry and primarily in long term care are the clinical outcomes and that over the past few years MVC has compared themselves with State and National averages along some of those critical indicators. One primary one is the % of residents with pressure ulcers and last year MVC's average percentage was 4% and this year we are proud to announce that we have decreased that and we are at 2%. To give a comparison the State and National average are both at 17% this year. This is a tremendous recognition for our Administrators and leadership teams for really being there 24 hours a day to make things happen for our veterans in a quality way. One of the quality indicators that is compared across State and National is the % of residents with physical restraints, last year MVC was at 4% and this year MVC is at 2%. State and National average are right at 7%. She noted that MVC is allowing our veterans that we honor and serve to be as independent as possible while providing a safe and secure environment. Another indicator is the % of residents with indwelling urinary catheter, across State and National and our nursing home system the average number of residents who have catheters is 6% and one of the dangers when inserting the catheter is the danger of infection. MVC's rate of infection this year was 1% with State and National averages at 6 and 7%. Another indicator is the % of residents with unplanned weight loss and MVC's percentage this year was 2% which was level with last year, State and National averages are 8 and 10%. One of the indicators that the Homes Program is very proud of is the overall satisfaction with the services that are provided. Annually the Homes Program does resident and family surveys and traditionally over the last three years MVC has been in the high 80's or low 90's for overall

satisfaction, this year the Homes Program is at 91% which means that people we serve tells us that we are doing a good job.

Ron Taylor informed that the Commission decided this spring to undertake a Medicaid Feasibility Study due to facing the issue of tough budget times and staffing issues a number of other states and their Veterans Homes decided the only way they could continue to fund and operate their Veterans Homes was to make them Medicaid approved. Out of 46 states with Veterans Homes, 23 are now Medicaid approved and 2 others are recommending to their Governor and state legislature that they go that way. MVC had some real concerns because we feel we currently have a good program, we provide high quality care and we want to make sure that nothing we do impacts our ability to deliver that level of care. Mr. Taylor noted that four of the states that are Medicaid approved attended the State Directors meeting in the spring to talk about what was involved and their thoughts regarding Medicaid. The state of Washington reported it has been Medicaid approved for 10 years and has advised Medicaid is a system that you can operate to ensure income and that it can be a resource, but if you have the states support, it is best to avoid it. Eric Endsley, Assistant Administrator, Mexico Veterans Home presented to the Commissioners the Medicaid Feasibility Study (handout). He noted the purpose of the study and that the definition of Medicaid is that it's a program that pays for medical assistance for certain individuals and families with low incomes and resources. Chairman Fairfax stated that the Commission will continue looking at the study. Ms. Roberta Kohler asked the Chairman if the Commission is moving that direction and if so how will the public be informed. Chairman Fairfax noted that we are just studying it now and at this time the Commissioners do not think it's a very viable thing but will continue looking at it and will notify people if it becomes necessary. Mr. Taylor noted as long as the state legislature and the administration will continue to support the funding of the veterans homes it probably is wise to avoid getting involved in Medicaid because it is whole different level of operations and best case scenario this doesn't save the state much money, especially if trying to maintain the same quality of care. Ms. Kohler thanked the Commission for the tremendous care her husband receives at the Warrensburg Veterans Home.

#### Construction Update: Ronald Taylor, Executive Director

**Construction Update** –Ron Taylor reported DVA has awarded \$843,966 to the state of Missouri to improve the Missouri State Veterans Cemetery in Springfield. The grant will pay 100 percent of the allowable costs for improvements at the state veterans cemetery in Springfield and the construction of an 856-niche columbarium. Once the letter has officially been received we should be able to receive funds for that construction immediately.

Service to Veterans Program: Stan Baughn, Director, Service to Veterans Program

**Service to Veterans** – Stan Baughn introduced the region Supervisors to the Commission. Bill Palmer, Southeast Region; John Burgess, Northwest Region; Jim Hurst, Northeast Region; and Jerilyn Cornelius, STV Program Secretary.

Mr. Baughn reported that the Service to Veterans Program is doing very well. They are continuing to see clients and reach out to those clients. They are looking at the areas to see where utilization can be best used. This year MVC has held 10 Supermarkets serving 1,302 registered veterans and 6 more Supermarkets are scheduled through the remaining year. A total of 16 Supermarkets for the year which is the most the Commission has held in recent years. Mr. Baughn noted the attendance as anticipated has decreased due to having held multiple Supermarkets in the same area over the past years. Mr. Baughn briefly described that Veterans Supermarkets are one stop shop for veterans to receive information, services, and referrals. The purpose is to inform and raise awareness to the earned benefits that veterans have accrued through their service in the military. A total of 36 Supermarkets have been held serving 8,873 veterans across the state and an estimated 20% of those have filed valid claims. Mr. Taylor stated that over the last 3 to 4 years over 6, 000 veterans since the VBATF kicked off in 2001 are now receiving VA benefits, an increase from 420 + million dollars to 594 million dollars from the federal government. Mr. Taylor also stated that over the last 6 to 8 months that the VBATF has not met and that Governor Blunt announced the creation of the Veterans Advisory Council which will be chaired by Lt. Governor Kinder. This Council may become the focal point for future activities. Vice Chairman Ross made a motion to instruct the staff to contact the Lt. Governor's office to find out the direction of the Advisory Council.

Vice Chairman Ross advised that he attended the Veterans Benefits Supermarket in Kansas City on August 3<sup>rd</sup>. He was very impressed with the number of people that was there but more so the number of Service Officers that were there to assist veterans and also the employment and veterans education opportunities that were available. One thing he especially noted was that the City of St. Joseph had a police officer there recruiting police officers. He noted the opportunities are there we just need to let the veterans know so they can attend.

Vice Chairman Ross announced that the Commission has hired a Minority Veterans Benefits Coordinator for the Kansas City and St. Louis area.

Mr. Baughn advised that the toll free line shows increases or decreases in usage dependent on the advertising in the area. To date a total of 7,681 calls have been received.

Cemeteries Update: Jess Rasmussen, Director Higginsville Cemetery

**Cemetery Program** – Jess Rasmussen reported to the Commissioners that the Cemetery has just finished their annual satisfaction surveys. Each Cemetery sent out to the last 100 families surveys asking for their services and facility to be rated in the category of excellent/good/fair/poor. The Commission received 247 responses back and from them only one was a negative response and that was a VA issue concerning how they do the inscriptions on the headstones. The survey results were graded in give categories and the overall grade was 3.88.

According the FY04 statistics that the National Cemetery Administration puts out, Missouri ranks 9<sup>th</sup> amongst 30 states and a total of 56 state veterans cemeteries in total number of interments.

The Commission has performed 3,104 interments and 11, 241 pre-certifications to date.

Mr. Rasmussen informed the Commissioners that in early June the Cemetery Directors and Maintenance Supervisors attended the National Cemetery Administration Conference in St. Louis.

In April the last known World War I Veteran left in Missouri, Fred Robb was buried in the Springfield State Veterans Cemetery.

June Barton who donated \$30,000 to the Bloomfield Veterans Cemetery Assistance League is being honored on September 1<sup>st</sup> at the cemetery with a luncheon.

Mr. Boyles, Director Swan Lake Memorial Gardens recently brought a veteran to the Higginsville Cemetery for burial per the family's request. Chairman Fairfax gave a brief summary of Swan Lake advertising practices.

VSO Grants: Hal Dulle, Deputy Director

**VSO Grant Program-** Hal Dulle (Handout) reported a total of \$750,000 has been appropriated for VSO Grants this fiscal year. To date 5 service organizations and St. Louis City and St. Louis County had submitted request totaling \$751,148. \$708,638 has been granted out so far for FY06, the difference is an additional request from American Legion, St. Louis

City and St. Louis County for additional funding this year. Until MVC receives additional information we have decided to delay a decision on these amounts. A meeting is scheduled at central office on August 30<sup>th</sup> with service organizations to discuss with them their grant proposals and also discuss tying that into the activities that the Commission participates in. A meeting is scheduled in St. Louis on September 1<sup>st</sup> with St. Louis City and St. Louis County to talk about their additional request of money. An update will be provided to the Commissioners following those meetings. Mr. Dulle advised that the Commission receives monthly and annual reports from these organizations on the VSO grant activity.

Outreach: Pat Rowe Kerr, Veterans Ombudsman

**Outreach** – Pat Rowe Kerr introduced Jeremy Amick, State Benefits Advisor with the Missouri National Guard. Ron Taylor asked that Mr. Amick provide the Commission with his business cards so that we can distribute to service officers.

The Moving Wall will be in Jefferson City November and they are looking for volunteers to assist at this event. Those interested in participating should contact Pat Rowe Kerr.

The Missouri Military Family Relief Fund Program was created this past session. The bill authorizes a contribution check-off box on state income tax forms for the Missouri Military Family Relief Fund and modifies the educational assistance grant program of the Missouri National Guard. The state of Illinois in which we are following as a model has awarded out 2.9 million dollars so far since its creation three years ago. Missouri has designed a logo which includes a dog tag and a yellow ribbon that will be on the 2006 state income tax form. All the contribution from the check-off will benefit Missouri National Guard families. A panel of three individuals will administer the fund and determine eligibility criteria for grants made from the fund. The panel will include a command sergeant major of the Missouri National Guard, a command sergeant major of the reserves or its equivalent, and a representative of the Missouri Veterans Commission. In addition to the tax check-off you can make a contribution in a separate payment or you can plan events to get dollars into the fund.

Ms. Kerr noted she is currently working with DESE in planning an event on Veterans Day November 11<sup>th</sup> in the schools “The Power of 11 Cents”. Children in grades K-7 can donate 11 cents and grades 8-12 can donate \$1.11 and perhaps partnering with Operation Military Kids and the 4H Program, this event has a potential of bringing in \$368,000. Ms. Kerr stated that raising funds for the relief program will take teamwork from communities. In the past 8 months the Missouri Veterans Commission has

raised over \$180,000 for guard members and reservists. Ms. Kerr explained that her position at the Commission is to work with the National Guard to reach returning veterans. She also raises funds for soldiers in need to compensate where the VA and DOD can't pay.

She reported the US Department of Agriculture has home loans for construction and remodeling that are available to persons meeting certain income qualifies and specifically have dollars that could assist the disabled.

Ms. Kerr stated that she and Stan Baughn will be meeting with the staff from the Social Security office regarding a "military" social security disability process that allows qualified injured soldiers to receive both a DOD check and an SSI check.

### **III. NEW BUSINESS:**

Chairman Fairfax reported that Bill Brenner, Presiding Commissioner, Johnson Co wrote a letter to MODOT on behalf of the West Central Veterans Assistance League requesting a matching grant (80/20) for funding of a 16 passenger bus with 6 handicap spaces for the Veteran's Home in Warrensburg. Funds in the amount of \$20,000 have already been raised by the Assistance League. The Assistance League is asking the support of the Commission to get this grant request accomplished. Chairman Fairfax instructed Ron Taylor to draft a letter to Brian Weiler, Director of MODOT endorsing this issue.

Representative David Pearce noted it is a tremendous honor to have the Commission meet in Warrensburg and stated that he is very impressed on what the Commission does for veterans. He noted that the staff at the Commission has been very responsive and also stressed the importance in the Commission to continue to educate the legislators on veterans benefits. Representative Pearce introduced to the Commission Bill Brenner, Presiding Commissioner, Johnson Co., Scott Sader, Eastern District Commissioner and Destry Hough, Western District Commissioner, Johnson County. He announced that the Warrensburg Rotary Club will be hosting a noon luncheon for the Commission at the American Legion Hall.

Ernie Lee, State Chair MAVO reported to the Commission that MAVO will have election of new officers at the next MAVO meeting on the 14<sup>th</sup> of September at 1:00 pm, DAV Building in Jefferson City. They will convene the meeting to travel to the State Capitol to meet with Senator Gibbons and the House Speaker to discuss expectations (what the veterans need) for proposed legislation for the upcoming session. A pre-meeting will be held on September 8<sup>th</sup> to prepare for the 14<sup>th</sup> meeting.



Roberta Kohler noted her concerns regarding the importance in level of nursing care at the Warrensburg Veterans Home and the financial increase for residents. Her husband is a current resident of the facility and she would like to see support of the Commissioners to continue funding. Chairman Fairfax advised that the Commissioners are in total support of the Homes and that hopefully the states will receive an increase in federal per diem to help the financial strain.

Stephen Gaither, Public Affairs Director, VAMC Columbia reported to the Commission that the hospital has been very busy taking care of more veterans than ever before. They are too struggling with the budgeting issues and they are to receive an increase in budget next year but will still be a challenge. September 16<sup>th</sup>, National POW Day will be celebrated at the Hospital. A total of 139 POW veterans mostly from WWII have been invited to attend a recognition ceremony. On October 29<sup>th</sup> a Homeless Veteran Standdown will take place at the Douglas High School. Standdowns are designed to help provide some basic services to the homeless veterans.

Stan Utley, Public Affairs, VAMC Kansas City reported the VAMC is very fortunate to have working relationship with the Missouri Veterans Homes. The VAMC KC has satellite clinics at the Warrensburg and Cameron Veterans Homes and last fiscal year the Warrensburg clinic saw 3,846 patients and Cameron clinic saw 3,103 patients. He noted they are basically on track this year to see that number or more of patients at the clinics. Mr. Utley stated that the VAMC KC has seen more of Operation Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom veterans each day as they are returning home. Some additional services being pushed out to the satellite clinics is mental health services, through a new program called Telemental Health where a mental health provider is done through video and is live inner active with the patient in the outreach areas and they do not have to be transported into the VAMC. Mr. Utley stated the VAMC did receive some supplemental funding. Most of the facilities in VISN15 have converted capital equipment into personal services dollars in order to maintain operations. This supplemental funding has been tagged primarily for capital money because VA Central Office knew that facilities across the nation were having to do this over the past couple of years. This will allow the VAMC to purchase some new equipment. VAMC KC is getting new cat scan machine, and they are opening a new Cardio Cath Lab in KC. Currently they send the Cardio Cath patients to VAMC Columbia for some services and also into the private sector. Budget is always an issue and the VA is trying to their best to accommodate veterans and reducing waiting lists. Also the VAMC KC is in the process of purchasing an outpatient building due to additional clinic space needed. The VAMC is planning a 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration on September 21<sup>st</sup> for the ending

of WWII. The public and the Missouri Veterans Commission is invited to attend the event. Vice Chairman Ross asked if the VAMC's are experiencing any problems with physician staffing. Columbia VA is actively recruiting and they have experienced shortage in specialty care physicians. VAMC in KC has done more contracting but noted a new position pay bill that goes into effect in January 2006 which will allow the hospital to be more competitive in those surgical and specialty areas. VAMC KC does have some shortage currently and especially in Neuro Surgery which is also a national shortage. They currently are sending some patients out of state for these services. The hospital has flown patients and their families to Denver VAMC for care. Pat Kerr advised that Wings of Hope in St. Louis has a flying service that can also be helpful.

John Burgess, STV Supervisor, Northwest Region reported to the Commission that he has served over the past three years on the VA Eastern Health Care System Advisory Board. Meetings are only held based upon need. Mr. Burgess noted that the VA Eastern Health Care System has experienced some budget issues however they are now operating on the positive side. Today they signing over a lease for 75 years 36 historical buildings to a developer therefore they will not have to maintain the buildings since they were spending over 1 million dollars for maintenance. Mr. Burgess also reported that VA Eastern Health Care System is having problems with their mental health side. There are so many soldiers returning from active duty from Fort Riley, KS that they are having to turn their veterans away. Mr. Burgess also reported that he was the one of the first to speak to the CARES Commission approximately two years ago. He informed them at the CARES Commissioner meeting that out of his guard unit there are thousands upon thousand of members being activated and that they need to increase the size of the outpatient clinic in St. Joseph. He reported to date they moved and they did not increase their staff and they closed new applications into the St. Joseph outpatient clinic because they were not able to increase the staff. Those people who are now signing up have to go to the Leavenworth VA Hospital system first and then try to get transferred out.

Jack Matthews, MVC Foundation, Inc. advised the Commissioners and guests that the 4<sup>th</sup> Annual "Chipping in for Veterans" golf tournament will be held on Friday, September 9<sup>th</sup> at Railwood Golf Club.

Jeremy Amick, MONG State Benefits Advisor reported a Benefits Briefing will be held on September 10<sup>th</sup> at the National Guard Armory. The guard is planning got conduct these briefing across the state to educate soldiers and their families with VA benefits, small business loans, Vet Center, Tri Care, VA Medical Center information, Educational and

State Veteran Benefits. The Missouri Veterans Commission has been invited to participate at these briefings.

### **NEXT MEETING**

The next Commission meeting will be held on Tuesday, November 1, 2005 in Jefferson City.

The Commission closed the meeting to conduct an executive session for the purpose to discuss personnel matters held pursuant to Section 610.021, Subsection (3) RSMo.

The meeting was reopened.

With no further business before the Commission the meeting was adjourned.



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Ronald L. Taylor, Secretary